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CEREBUS

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230
MAY

EXCERPT

The intensification of criminal life that drug traffic would provide still lay several decades away, but down the bleak vista of the cold war (which may yet be seen as a spiritual plague more pervasive, although less quickly fatal, than AIDS), Warhol must have been the first to gain keen insight into the pervasiveness of this plague. If its first symptom (buried under every hypocrisy of patriotism) was lack of respect for the human condition, Warhol perceived that as a corollary, there was going to be boundless if subterranean lack of respect for art. A painter could get away with more now than ever before! So Warhol, a mediocre draftsman, a colorist without his own palette, moved into the void. The emptiness of others was the barren field he would seed for a cash crop. He was a magician.

By now, Warhol is seen as a great artist even by people who do not profit directly from such an evaluation. Yet to think of him as an immortal American painter is to inspire the yaws. One need merely compare such sentiments with the pride of the Spanish and the French in Picasso or Matisse. No, Warhol's real claim to fame was not as an artist, but as the philosopher of voids and silences. Before anyone else, he comprehended the vacuum of Western culture in the second half of the twentieth century. "Authority," Warhol could easily have said, if he had been inclined to give his secret away — "authority imprinted upon emptiness is money!" And he was right. The history of the last half of the twentieth century can be seen as a study in authority, money, and emptiness. The spiritual diorama of our time is the triumph of high-rise corporate architecture in every major city of the world, the proliferation of plastic into food and flesh, the presence of the homeless, AIDS, drug life, and now, in the aftermath of the cold war, ethnic cleansing, that corrosive purgative that looks to cure all the other ills, the first worldwide hint of a time to come when upturned heads will wait for a messiah with an authoritative voice. "I am the emptiness," Warhol could as well have said. "I am the emptiness that prepares you for the message to come." He is the maggot genius of American culture.

Madonna, born in 1958, young enough to have been Warhol's daughter, was nonetheless reacting to the same void. But in drastically different fashion. She was, after all, like her generation, part of the horde of walking wounded. If nuclear fission would be the mortician to preside over her last rites, then, indeed, she would explore sex, and with an instinctive rebellion against all large hypocrisies. One did not have to be political to sense the vast fraud of the cold war — we had all been adjured to triumph over an Evil Empire that had turned out to be no more than a Sad Morass, at least for the last twenty years, a giant Third World quagmire buried in inefficiencies, bereft of desire for world domination. Our political leaders had converted language into cant, and our young — particularly those with good ears — reacted to the false note.

continued on last page

CEREBUS
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RICK'S STORY
•
(Cerebus 220 to Cerebus 231)

MONTHLY
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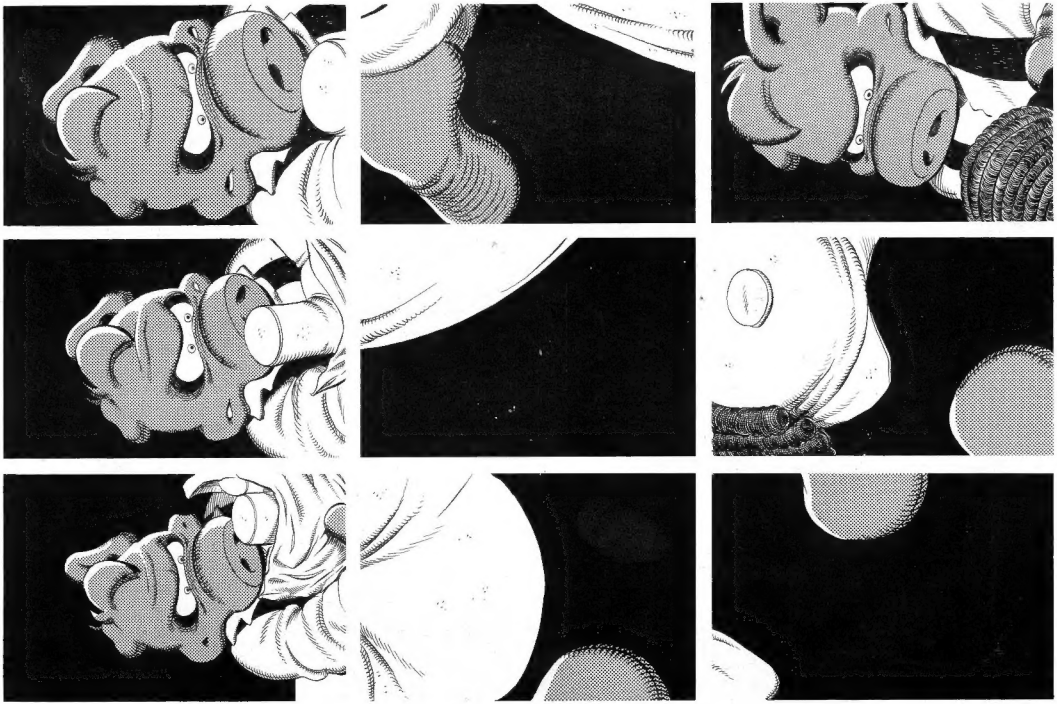
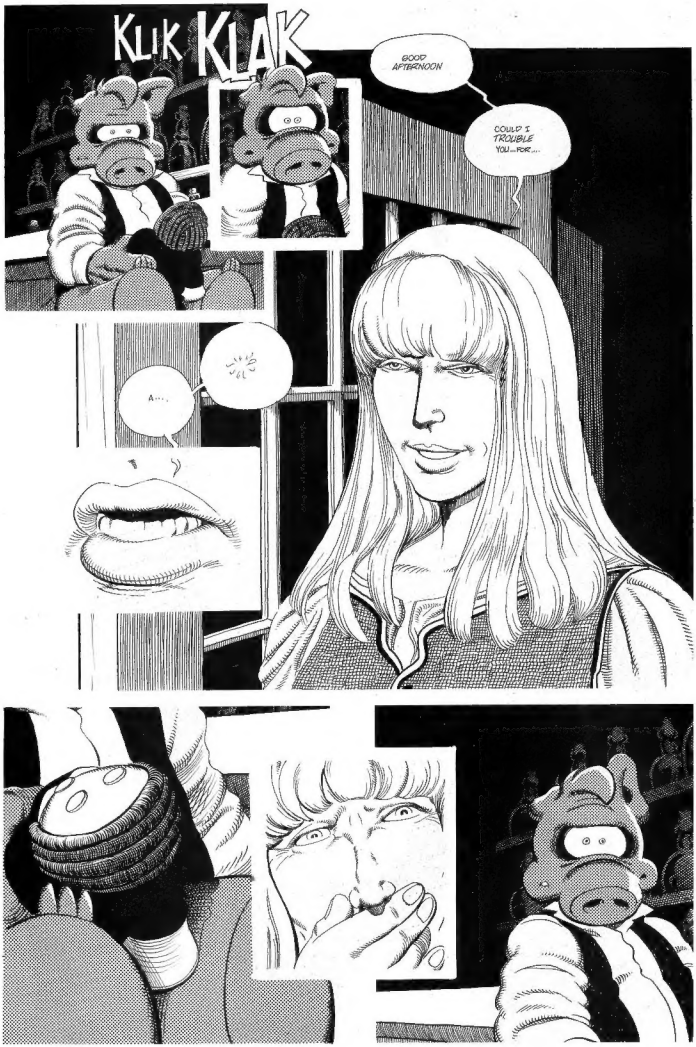
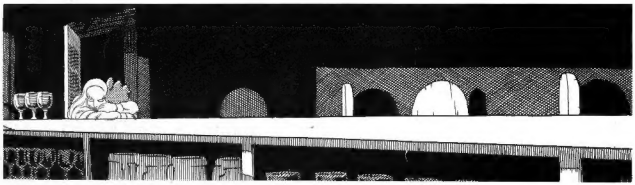


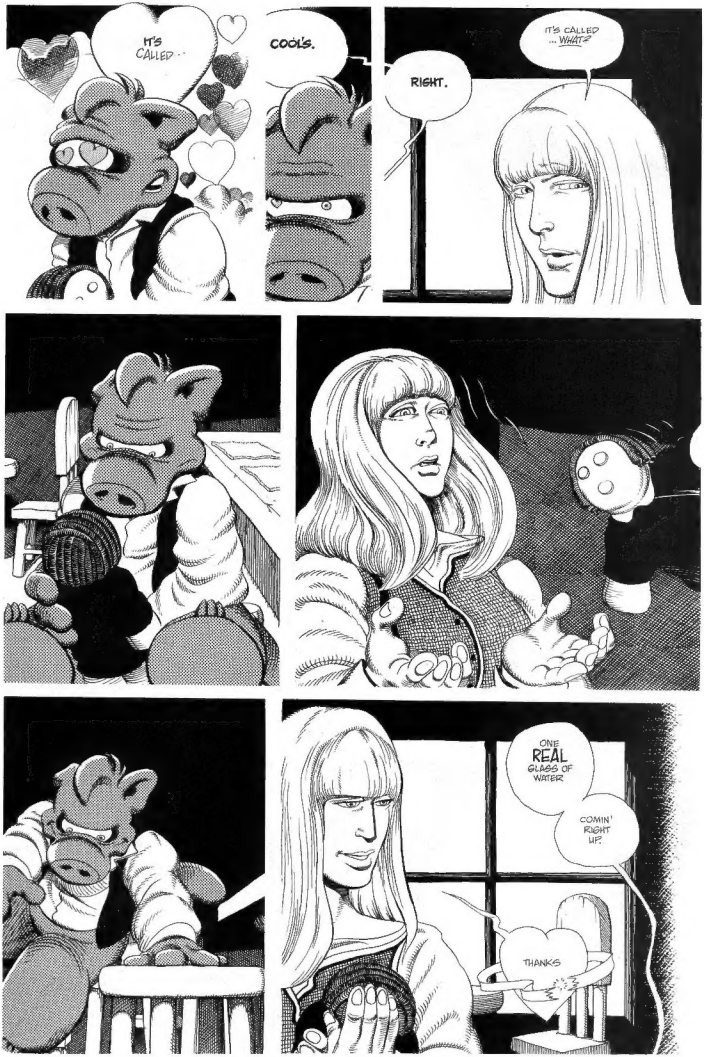

KLIK KLAK
GOOD AFTERNOON
COULD I TROUBLE YOU...FOR...
A....

?
IT'S YOU!
IT'S REALLY YOU!...

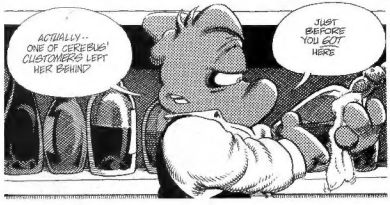


OH!
WATER!

YOU DON'T MIND IF I HAVE SOME, DO YOU?
I'M REALLY THIRSTY...
MIND?
Tooh.
YUK
HOW HORRID!
IT-- IT LOOKS LIKE WATER
BUT IT TASTES LIKE
WATERY BEER


IT'S CALLED..
COOL'S.
IT'S CALLED ... WHAT?
RIGHT.
ONE REAL GLASS OF WATER
COMIN' RIGHT UP.
THANKS

AND THEN THE NEXT PLACE I WENT TO THE SAME THING HAPPENED ...
AND THEN HE WALKED AWAY AS IF HE DIDN'T HEAR ME EITHER.
SO, BY THE TIME I FOUND THIS PLACE I HAD ALMOST GIVEN UP HOPE...
THE BARTENDER SET THE GLASS OF RED WINE DOWN
AND I SAID, "EXCUSE ME? I ORDERED WATER?"
YOU REALLY KEPT MISSY ALL THIS TIME?


ACTUALLY -- ONE OF CERBERUS' CUSTOMERS LEFT HER BEHIND
JUST BEFORE YOU GOT HERE

HAHAHA

MISSY SAYS, "YOU MUSTN'T FIB."

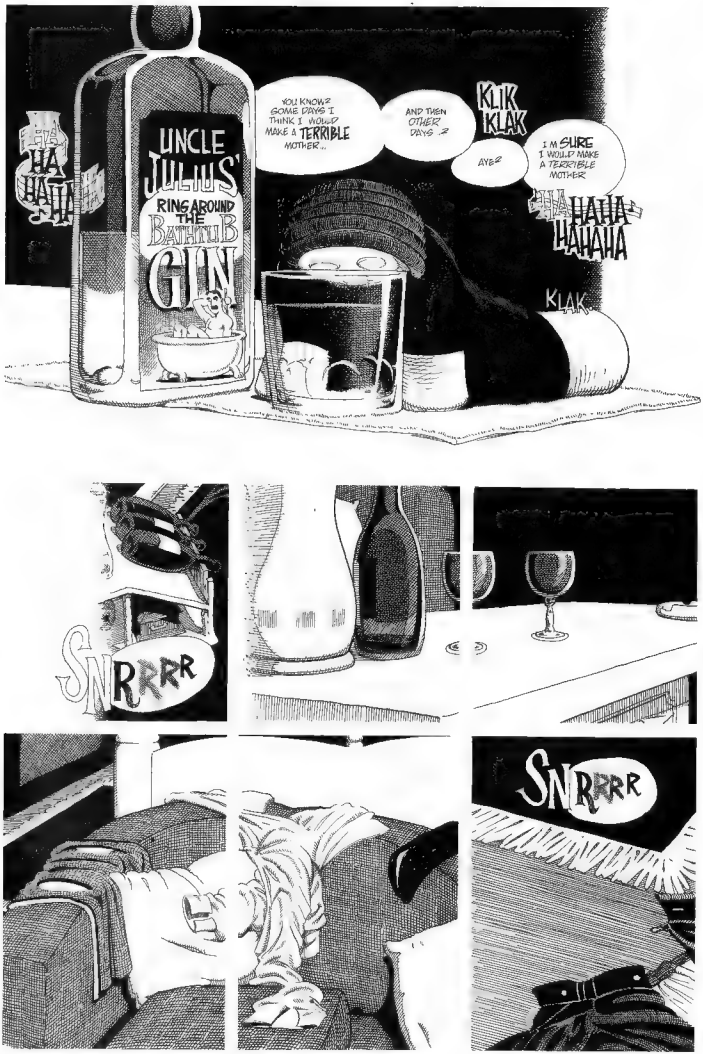
TELL MISSY TO KEEP HER OPINIONS TO HERSELF OR SHE CAN FIND SOMEONE ELSE TO MOOCH HER GIN OFF OF
GASP
MISSY DOESN'T DRINK!
MAYBE NOT WHEN YOU KNEW HER
SIP
MISSY!

...AND THERE SHE'D BE -- UP ON THE BAR WITH HER LITTLE BLACK DRINK UP OVER HER HEAD...
HAHA HAHA
WASSH YOU BAD GIRL
YOU KNOW? COME TO THINK OF IT...
AYE?
MY PERFUME WAS ALWAYS MISSING
OH, AYE -- PERFUME, SILVER POLISH, GLASS CLEANER
CEREBUS ONCE SAW HER DRINK A WHOLE GUART OF PAINT THINNER JUST TO WIN A BET...
HA HA HA HA
ALLY?
OH AYE! WITH CEREBUS' OWN SWORD!
BUT-- WHY WOULD SHE DO THAT?
SHE REALLY WANTED TO BE POPE
OR POPESSE OR POPETTE OR WHATEVER YOU WOULD CALL IT
DOES IT AFFECT YOUR HEARING?
WHAT?
DOES HAHAHA YOU IDIOT?
DECIDED I'M NOT GETTING ANY YOUNGER... IF I WASN'T GOING TO GO OUT AND SEE THE WORLD NOW, WHEN WAS I?
ALSO PALNU STINKS
YOU SAID IT...
HAHAHA?
NO -- I MEAN IT ACTUALLY STINKS
THE WHOLE PLACE IS ONE BIG DISTILLERY NOW... EVEN THE FLOWERS SMELL LIKE WHISKEY
I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU ACTUALLY HEARD ABOUT THAT-- HONESTLY, THAT PLACE LEAKS LIKE A SIEVE
HIS NAME WAS ANDREW... AND I MUST'VE WASTED SIX MONTHS OF MY LIFE TRYING TO GET HIM TO COME TO A "CANDLELIGHT SUPPER"
THAT WAS REALLY WHEN I DECIDED I JUST HAD TO GET OUT OF PALNU...
I JUST GOT SO TIRED OF...
TOLD HER RIGHT FROM THE START THAT CEREBUS DIDN'T LOVE HER
DID SHE LOVE YOU?
SHE DRIVE CEREBUS INSANE MOST OF THE TIME SO....
YEAH -- SHE PROBABLY DID

I WILL NEVER GET MARRIED AGAIN. I'M JUST NOT A WIFE.... THE WHOLE TIME RICK AND I WERE MARRIED
IT WAS AS IF I WASN'T HIS WIFE AT ALL. IT WAS AS IF I WAS HIS MOTHER
I MEAN, I, EITHER HAD TO NAG HIM ALL THE TIME "RICK! PICK UP YOUR CLOTHES!" "RICK! DID YOU FINISH THE LAUNDRY?"
OR I HAD TO DO EVERYTHING MYSELF
IT MADE SEX IMPOSSIBLE IT SEEMED LIKE.... LIKE... INCEST AS IF MY SON WAS PAWING AT ME
FOR CERBERUS IT WAS AS IF SOMEONE HAD GLUED HERSELF ONTO HIM
HAHAHAHA
HAHA..
SO THAT'S WHAT CERBERUS TOLD MARTY WHEN HE SAID HE WAS GETTING MARRIED
LISTEN. GO OUT AND FIND ANOTHER PERSON GLUE THEM TO YOUR BUTT FOR A FEW WEEKS AND IF YOU FIND YOU LIKE IT...
HAHAHAHA
"THEN, MARTY? MARRIAGE IS FOR YOU!"
OH YOU'RE BAD
giggle
THERE WAS A FUNNY GUY... HEH.
MARTY
IT DIDN'T MATTER WHAT YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT-- SAY-- METAL-WORKING-- HERE MARTY WOULD SAY, "IT MIGHT INTEREST YOU TO KNOW THAT AT ONE TIME I W
I'M SORRY TO INTERRUPT BUT WHEN DO YOU USUALLY CLOSE?
SUNDOWN

HAHAHAHA
HAHAHAHA
I UNDERSTAND THAT YOU BARTENDERS LEAD PRETTY LUXURIOUS LIVES..
OH AYE!
AYE
WELL, WHAT I WAS GOING TO SUGGEST WAS- THAT WE GO UP TO YOUR ROOM AND GET- YOU KNOW
COZY
AYE?
♪ LA-HUNH..
THERE'S JUST ONE...
SMALL
PROBLEM

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO WITH
'EMM · EYE · EGG · EGG · WHY"?
EMM.
EYE.
' EGG
YOU HAVE A PLAN?


HA HA HA!
UNCLE JULIUS' RING AROUND THE BATHTUB GIN
YOU KNOW SOME DAYS I THINK I WOULD MAKE A TERRIBLE MOTHER...
AND THEN OTHER DAYS...?
KLIK KLAK
AYE?
I'M SURE I WOULD MAKE A TERRIBLE MOTHER
HAHA HAHA HAHAHA
KLAK
SNRRRR
SNRRRR

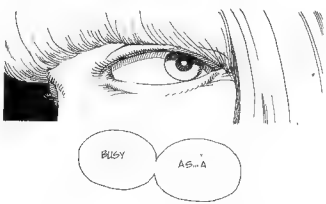
Thank You Tamm..
Dave
SNRRRR
Whoever
SNX?
PLEASE,
PLEASE SAY IT WASN'T A DREAM
PLEASE
PLEASE SAY THAT WHEN CERBERUS OPENS HIS EYES AND LOOKS.....
JAKA WILL STILL BE THERE
THUD
FOMP

FUCKING (NO SWEARING) WRITERS...
FLUMP
SNATCH
Dearest Cerebus -
Last night was wonderful.
Maybe someday we'll
see each other again.
All my love,
Jaka
(over)
FLUMP
(OVER)
Ha-ha! Just kidding.* I can't stand wearing the same clothes two days in a row, so I've come to find a clothing hut and something to eat. (besides raw potatoes!) Be back soon!
xx
oo J
*not about last night
TWITCH
HAHAHAHAHA
HAHAHAHAHA

"RICK WAS HERE. JUST A WHILE AGO"
"REALLY? HOW WAS HE?"
"OH -- YOU KNOW- OLD. FAT. ALMOST BALD."
"HAH HAH WELL, YOU'D SAY HE WAS EVEN IF HE LOOKED WONDERFUL."
WHAT DID SHE MEAN BY THAT?
SHE'S STILL IN LOVE WITH GIRLY-BOY!
NAY!
AYE
NAY
SHE THOUGHT CEREBUS WAS LYING
WELL, CEREBUS WASN'T LYING - GIRLY-BOY IS OLD... FAT.. ALMOST BALD
AND UGLY
WIPE
WIPE
WIPE
THAT'S RIGHT - HOW COULD CEREBUS FORGET TO MENTION HOW UGLY GIRLY BOY GOT...?

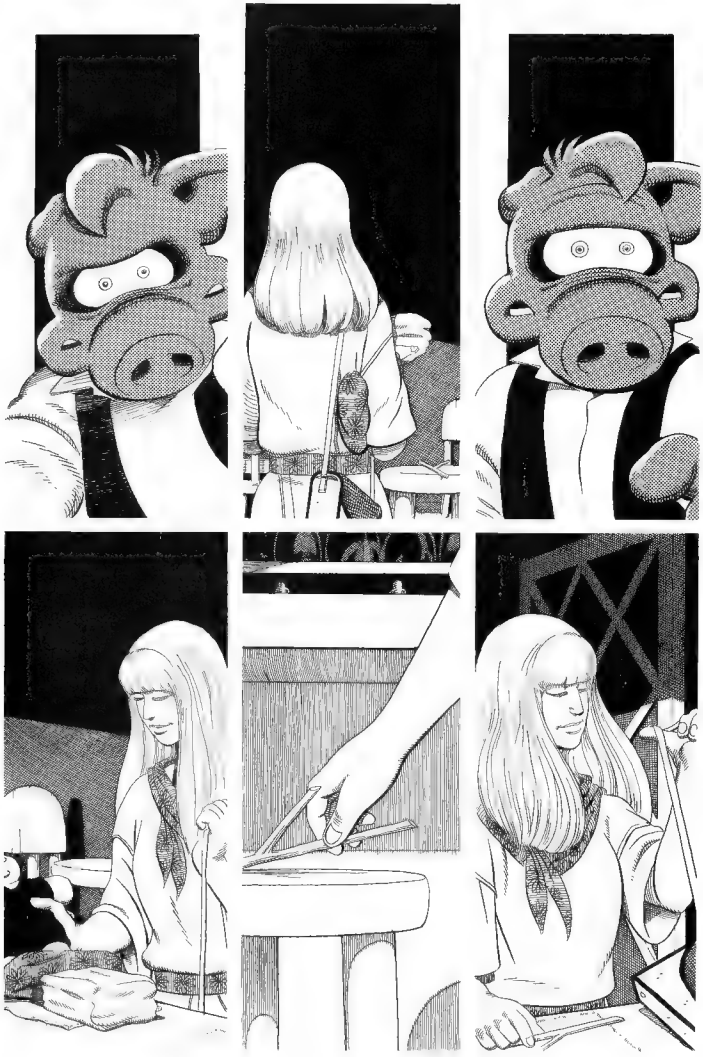
JOANNE DIDN'T SEEM TO THINK SO
JOANNE WAS A SLUT.
JOANNE WAS A SLUT?
WELL, FINE, THEN. WHY DOESN'T CEREBUS ASK JAKA HOW MANY MEN JAKA HAS
SHUT UP!
...LISTEN... CEREBUS IS GETTING TIRED OF THIS "SHUT UP" STUFF -- IF WE'RE GOING TO TALK ABOUT SOMETHING, THEN WE
KLIK KLAK
WIPEWIPEWIPEWIPEWIPEWIPE

GOOD MORNING MY LOVE
I SEE YOU'RE ALREADY

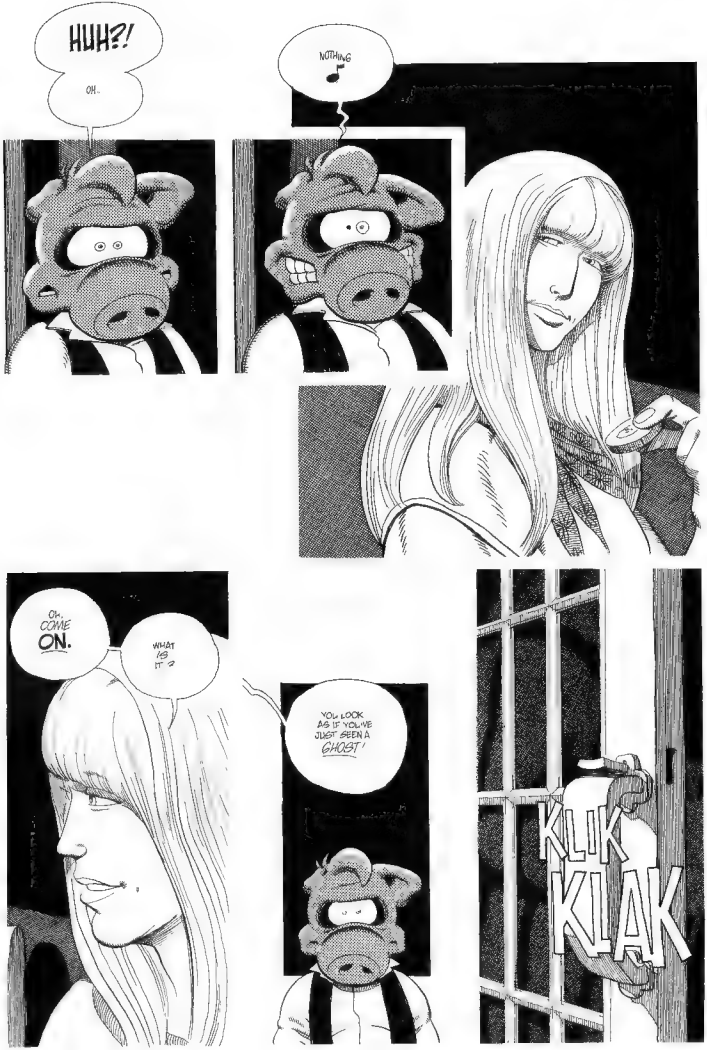

BUSY
AS...A

HAHAHA
HUH?
OH! AYE
WHAT A MESS
SHE PUKED ALL OVER THE BAR LAST NIGHT
AHAHA
NEVER AGAIN
CAME TO, JUST AS CERBERUS WAS FINISHING WIPING IT ALL UP
DRANK A HALF A GALLON OF WATER
SCRAWLED THAT MESSAGE
AND PASSED RIGHT OUT AGAIN
COLDER'N A DEAD MACKERAL
HA HA HA HA HA
HAHA
SNORE
YOU REALLY WOULD MAKE A TERRIBLE MOTHER
I KNOW!
HAHA
HAHA

giggle
I GUESS I SHOULD JUST LEAVE HER ALONE TO SLEEP IT OFF
NAY. YOU CAN PICK HER UP IF YOU WANT
WHEN SHE GETS LIKE THIS?
YOU CAN THROW HER AGAINST THE WALL IF YOU WANT
SHE PROBN'T FEEL A THING
HUNH!!
WIPE WIPE
I GUESS I'M NOT THE ONLY ONE AROUND HERE WHO SHOULDN'T HAVE CHILDREN
BY THE WAY I PICKED UP SOME CUCUMBER SLICES, ALFALFA SPROUTS AND FRESH CHERRY TOMATOES FOR US..
YOU DID?
I'M JUST KIDDING
I PICKED THEM UP FOR ME
YOU CAN STICK WITH YOUR MOUTH-WATERING RAW POTATOES
WHEW.



SCRAPE SCRAPE
KRINKLE KRINKLE RUSTLE
TWITCH!
WHAT?


HUH?!
OH..
NOTHING
OH, COME ON.
WHAT IS IT ?
YOU LOOK AS IF YOU'VE JUST SEEN A GHOST!
KLIK KLAK

LENDING LEGITIMACY

I'm always on the lookout for something that will genuinely "expand the comic-book marketplace." This contribution from Rory Root and Alex Amado -- reprinted from the newsletter of the Direct Line Group, seems promising to me. Reprinted with permission.

"Without the help of our local comic-book store manager, our Graphic Novel collection would not be nearly as popular or current."

—Lora Bruggerman, Librarian
School Library Journal, January 1997

With the growth in the quantity and scope of graphic novels and compilations that are now available, this burgeoning market has begun to make its presence known in outlets traditionally reserved for books with more words and fewer pictures. One interesting and promising avenue of exposure is through the library system — thousands of local libraries have begun to develop graphic-novel collections, and — as our experience at Comic Relief (Berkeley, CA) and the above quote from Ms. Bruggerman show — they're desperate for an unbiased source of information and opinion to help them through the uncharted waters of the comic-book world.

First, a word or two about why this is such a valuable outlet for comics (aside from the revenue, which never hurts...). The primary reason for working with libraries to get comprehensive graphic-novel selections into place is the exposure it provides for our medium. Nowhere else are individual copies of graphic novels likely to get read by so many interested readers — and not just comics readers! Libraries are a gold mine of *potential* comic-book readers just waiting to be educated about how much enjoyment comics can bring. At the Downtown Berkeley Public Library, the single title *Watchmen* was checked out 56 times in 1996 — that beats all but the very hottest best-selling novels! And other titles there performed nearly as well. Numbers like these have drawn many libraries to the inescapable conclusion that graphic novels have become a significant part of our contemporary literary landscape and that they need to talk to experts in the field to help get them up to speed on this rapidly expanding medium.

That's where retailers come in. Comic-book retailers are in a unique position to offer special services to their local and regional libraries. Neither publishers nor distributors are able to provide librarians with the scope of product, the knowledge of the medium, as strong a sense of local community needs, and the guidance that they often require in this unfamiliar terrain. Retailers also offer something else (and this is crucial): the comics store, if it's well-stocked and well-organized, can be the best showroom for comics that these librarians will ever see. The breadth of selection retailers offer, along with an in-depth knowledge of the product, and the ability for these buyers to actually look at the merchandise before they buy it are a nearly unbeatable combination. Comic Relief has found that librarians who believe that they are quite firm on their budgets will often waver in the face of all the quality material on the store shelves. At the very least, they invariably come back with bigger budgets the following quarter.

Which brings me to another strength of library sales — they're cyclical. A library starting a graphic-novel collection will come to you with a few hundred or a few thousand dollars to spend, and one can help them select a solid base from the many thousands of books that are available. Once that budget item is established, it will be renewed annually, and — as dictated by the success of the collection — it may even increase from year to year. Once comic-book literature has entered into this library cycle, it becomes a perennial part of how they do business, with new acquisitions sought on a quarterly basis and budgets (hopefully) ever-increasing.

Even though it sounds like a match made in heaven, it still took Comic Relief three years of building relationships with librarians and branch book buyers to reach the point where we now supply more than 60 libraries in the greater Bay Area. And it's also not a get-rich-quick sort of operation. It started very small, with a request for some copies of *Bone* here and a run of *Elfquest* there. However, an invitation to speak at the Bay Area Young Adult Library's Conference (BAYA) gave Comic Relief owner Rory Root the opportunity to explain the need for graphic novels to representatives of more than 80 local libraries. Within three months, Comic Relief's library business had skyrocketed, and they have recently sold more than $30,000 worth of books to these libraries.

Although retailers are in a unique position to interface with local and regional library buyers, they can't do the job alone. Comic Relief owes thanks to its many vendors and distributors for the product support, flexibility, and encouragement they've given. Here are a few things that publishers can do to continue to support the ongoing efforts to maximize the exposure of comic books through libraries.

• Subscribe to library publications, including *The School Library Journal* and *VoYA* (Voices of Young Adults). Knowing the field is an important first step to being able to anticipate its needs and questions. Furthermore, being aware of library peer reviews when they run can give a publisher a valuable sales tool and increase the hundreds of potential graphic-novel sales into thousands.

• Target select writers at these library journals, providing them review copies of graphic novels and collections. Create focused press releases emphasizing library success stories (like Berkeley's remarkable 56 check-outs of *Watchmen!*). Hard numbers of copies borrowed mean more to library buyers than any amount of enthusiastic hyperbole.

• Provide age-appropriateness lists of your publications to assist focused buyers in narrowing down the list. Many

graphic novels are purchased for the young adult section of the library, and the removal of adult or mature audience material will make their selections easier and more appropriate.

• Provide "sell sheets" or lists with short, pithy plot synopses. Fifteen-word summaries, using comparisons to other (preferably non-comics) fiction, can make a real difference in sales numbers, especially since many regional buyers will send out lists you supply to their branches to use in making selections.

• Provide sample copies and other support material to those retailers who are making headway in the public library arena.

• Keep current in-print, out-of-print, temporarily unavailable lists for all graphic novels and compilations. There is nothing more frustrating for a library vendor than purchase order for 50 copies of an out-of-print book, and often that money is not recoverable by the comics store. Keeping retailers informed of the status and availability of your volumes gives them a vital tool for increasing and perpetuating library sales.

Properly pursued, the expansion of graphic novels into libraries will promise not only needed revenues for retailers and publishers, but will also deliver thousands of new readers for the future of our industry.

correspondence

AARDVARK COMMENT

Dear Dave,

I just read #222, and I was really struck by your Emotional/Reason/Wisdom fissiparation. At twenty years of age, never having done time in a Siberian gulag or learned to levitate in Tibet, I don't really qualify as a Wise Person, but I feel as though I ought to write in with some observations because that three-way split of yours mirrors a similar split that I just (sort of) resolved recently myself. I've always tended to perceive the Big Fight as being more between Reason and Faith than between Reason and Emotion (not at all the same thing), but the same dynamic operates in either arena. (I'll explain that in a moment.) As I understand you, you're saying that Emotion is Wrong — or, for clarity, Least Right — Reason is Sort Of Right, and Wisdom is Really Right. I used to look at Faith, Reason, and Wisdom the same way, but I've come to believe that it's more like this: Faith is Right For the Wrong Reasons, Reason is Wrong For the Right Reasons, and Wisdom is Right For the Right Reasons. I know that sounds pretty simplistic, but it's my belief that the truest, profoundest things in life tend also to be the simplest.

I'm not sure if I'm approaching the level of coherency I was shooting for when I started this letter, but I think your point about Communism illustrates my essential argument pretty much to perfection. A Reasonable Person might well be swayed by the "ability, need" equation, but it seems to me that an Emotional Person, upon finishing the Manifesto, would look up at Marx, look down at the book, look up at Marx again, and go: "Dude...it's not gonna work. — Huh? I mean, I dunno — you can just, you know, tell." And, man — he'd be right. My old man teaches philosophy, so I come from a very rationalist, intellectualist background; all my life I've been wrestling with that God-damned hubristic proclivity to glance at the Emotional argument and dismiss it with a sniff: "Bah — he hasn't even the most rudimentary notion of how to define terms, establish a thesis, connect ideas, blah blah blah..." — none of which refutes the argument itself. Thomas was a man of Reason — lemme see the nail-prints — but Simon, the simple one, got made Peter. In short, as you pointed out, Reason can occlude spiritual insight.

Of course, Emotion isn't much better off without Reason to guide it. Either one, alone, can stumble across the occasional truth — but you really need both to go hunting for The Truth. And I'm not portraying Wisdom as some sort of Hegelian synthesis or second-generation heterosis — rather, the opposite: Reason and Emotion are Wisdom's estranged bastard offspring or — no, I've got it. In Plato's Symposium (I think), Socrates told a tale of the original humans, who were hermaphroditic and thus self-sufficient — but that big asshole Zeus split them into male and female. Maybe that's just Plato's metaphor for the polarization of Wisdom into Reason and Emotion. Anh?

The obvious problem is that you can't just decide to be Wise; you have to start either with Reason or with Emotion. Reason is the more difficult of the two and therefore probably the better way to go; Dante only got to Heaven by way of Hell, after all. But I believe that if you ever get to a point at which you can be considered Wise, you're probably going to find yourself agreeing with the Emotional People more often than with the Reasonable People. It's the Emotional People who say things like: "All the money in the world won't buy you happiness" — and while the Reasonable People are scoffing in paroxysms of superiority over such flowery mush, the Wise People are saying, "That's right, kid. That's exactly right."

With ya 'til 300, brother,
James Toner

Well, let's see. A Reasonable person, in my definition of the term, would have "Money won't buy you happiness" as a very large and inescapable article of faith. As would a Wise person. I think the Emotional people are far more apt to fall into the materialism snare since material possessions do *provide temporary, illusory* happiness, *make friends* envious, *alleviate the* fear *of poverty temporarily, etc.*

In reading your point about my point about Communism, it does seem that it was one of those things which could only be eliminated as a societal force by having every possible application tried and rejected. I wonder how many other things in society are like that? They look permanent but won't be around in a hundred years, once the Emotional, Reasonable, and Wise folks have all had a kick at the cat.

Anyway, you write a very interesting letter. You really must write again some time. Oh, wait. Here you are now:

Hey again, Dave,

I know I wrote to you about a week ago, but I only just now got through #223 and I thought I ought to write down my thoughts on it — and as long as I'm writing them down, I figure I'll send 'em to you on the off chance that you might be interested. In the Comment, you draw what I think is a damned sensible distinction between Needs and Desires; I think, however, that there's another dimension to that distinction which you don't really address. I've heard it argued that sin can be defined in this way: all that which proceeds from the Body is Evil, while all that which proceeds from the Soul is Good. I find the argument nonsensical for two reasons: first, human beings are physical as well as spiritual entities; and second — and perhaps even more importantly — the greatest sin of all is hubris (the most direct form of defiance to the First Commandment and the root of Lucifer's sin and thus of all evil), a sin of the spirit if ever there was one. The puritanical "flesh is bad" litmus test fails because it distinguishes not between Good and Evil but between Soul and Body — a failure which your Needs/Desires bifurcation seems (to me, at least) to reverse while still making the same basic mistake.

Maslow aside, I believe self-actualization is a function of the Soul which has very little to do with the Needs of the Body. I also believe that there is a material aspect to Desire which is at least as superfluous as the "need" for reassurance: you Need food, but nobody Needs champagne and caviar. I'm not sure how clear I'm making myself, but what I'm trying to say is that there are Needs and Desires of the Body, and there are Needs and Desires of the Soul — as opposed to Needs being purely physical and Desires purely spiritual. Man is a spiritual being, dammit, as well as a temporal one; and while the Ebenezer Scrooges may be as fit as a fiddle on the physical plane, all their power and luxury won't breathe life into them. You may not Need love — but you damn well need something aside from food, clothing, and shelter.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not advocating asceticism or anything (I spent a week living in an Orthodox monastery a while back — I'm Catholic; wanted to broaden the ol' theological horizons — and, man, it was tough; I loathe the idea of life without my electricity and my running water and my red meat). And I'm not defending the ascendancy of erotic love. But, brother, you've got to love something. Your work, for instance. I've never been in love, and I'm getting along okay — but take my pen away from me and life would be a pretty bleak proposition, any degree of worldly pelf notwithstanding. Like the man says, "What profit doth a man show if he gain the whole world and in the process lose his soul?" In *Reads*, you said it would be nice if someone were to give you a bag of gold and tell you to write whatever you felt like writing. What would you do if someone offered you the riches of Croesus — on the condition that you never write again?

I hope all that didn't sound too churchy. All I'm really getting at is that there are Needs beyond the mere basic physical requirements. I certainly agree with your argument that the vast majority of "needs" in today's decadent, Gibbonesque society are not only spurious but transparently so, and I think your point about distinguishing between happiness and gratification is a damned cogent one. In fact, it seems to me that the two are pretty near mutually exclusive. Since one can never have enough gratification, the person who seeks it will be forever unsatisfied and thus unhappy; and as for the person who has true happiness — what need has he of anything else?

Down with the aardvark posse for life,
James Toner

Actually, in Reads, *I believe it was in reference to Leonardo da Vinci that I mentioned the bag of gold. What if someone who did not have creative freedom — which Leonardo didn't — could have had it provided for him? What would he have created instead of what he did create? I'm not sure if creativity is a need, but I sure lean in the direction of your argument if I have to go for a few days without writing and/or drawing. I'm not sure if it's as "bad" or bad or Bad as my cigarette addiction, for example. But I'm pretty sure it would be better for my soul if I* didn't *"need" or need or Need to write and draw (in a declension from "worse" to worse to Worst). It sounds to me as if we're both advocating asceticism, and we just have to be strong enough to admit that we're incapable of sustaining its pure practice rather than disparaging its obvious (to me, anyway) merits.*

I haven't read the word "pelf" since my recent dip into Walter Scott's The Lay of the Last Minstrel.

part four

MAMA'S BOY

This is starting to sound like a bad Marx Brothers routine. "Well, lasta issue you remember I said I no do the part four of the Mama's and the Boys on account of my mother, she's in Florida on a vacation. Well, my mother she come back from vacation just-a few days ago. But, guess what? Now I'm-a *go to Florida on vacation,*

and my mother she stays here. So, I'm-a no finish part four of the Mama's and the Boys like I'm-a said I would. I'm-a finish it in my head, but Kim Preney he say I'm-a no can print what is in your head, Dave, and guess what? Thatsa true."

Fortunately, I ran across this in the Charles Schulz interview in The Comics Journal*'s 200th issue, which emphasizes one of the central points of the "Mama's Boy" series of essays. Congratulations to Gary Groth and the Legion of Gloom on their anniversary. Quotes reprinted without permission:*

Just to set this up, Gary is trying to get Mr. Schulz to indict himself for agreeing to have lunch with Ronald Reagan, when Reagan was governor of California, since Schulz has identified himself in the interview as a liberal. Always interesting to read someone confronting Gary's singular notions of integrity for the first time. Gary offers that Jules Feiffer would not have gone — or might not have gone, appearing to imply that there is integrity in not agreeing to have lunch with someone you disagree with politically. "But that's...insulting," *Mr. Schulz replies.* "That's beyond politics, isn't it?" *It is only good manners to accept an invitation from someone who is ahead of you in society's pecking order, and the Governor of the state in which you reside is, well, ahead of you in the pecking order if you are a cartoonist. Mr. Schulz is clearly caught flat-footed. Good manners are...what is the word?...*beyond *politics?* above *politics?* supersedes *politics? Mr. Schulz quotes a story from Joanne Greenberg's* I Never Promised You a Rose Garden *wherein her father instructed her to stand up when a man was coming by, saying,* "This is Senator So-and-So coming by," *and telling her after-the-fact that* "the position deserves respect." *I can well imagine the blank Grothian stare that greeted this little tidbit. Mr. Schulz attempts to amplify the observation,* "I think to use your own personal views to say to the President of the United States, I'm not going to come, that's childish." *Mr. Schulz attempts, I would speculate, to deflate the blankness of Gary's reaction by extrapolating the California pecking order into a United States of America pecking order. Clearly the look on Gary's face states eloquently that if the President's views did not match Gary's own (and who could picture any President measuring up to Gary's idiosyncratic notions of integrity?), the President would find himself one short for dinner on the night in question.* "Again, I don't want to get into that," *Schulz concludes his immediate thought. One empathizes with his situation. Where to from here? Why am I having to defend going to lunch with the Governor of my state when he asked me to?* What *can I say after I say that it would be insulting* not *to go? Gamely, Mr. Schulz gives it a try:* "I would have given anything in the world to have met General Eisenhower. What an honor. What a tremendous feat he had commanding D-Day. The decisions he had to make were just unbelievable." *Blank, blank, blank look from across the tape recorder. Mr. Schulz is forced to fall back on a generalization:* "And a lot of other people I'd like to meet just for that..." *"reason," I suspect he was going to say, but it would appear that the blankness of Gary's reaction had finally sunk in. Mr. Schulz had gone from discussing the Governor of California to the President of the United States to the most rarefied heights of the Charles Schulz Pecking Order — Dwight David Eisenhower — and nothing was having an impact.* Nothing. *Mr. Schulz retreats from the loftiest heights to the practical necessities of the question, his lunch with Governor Reagan:* "Reagan was a very thoughtful person." *Gary's opening he's been waiting for.* "That's hard to believe (laughs)." *Mr. Schulz is reputed to have the patience of a saint, and certainly at this point it was — to this reader's eyes — being tried to the breaking point for any lesser man.* "No, extremely thoughtful. Very personable, and he would never forget you. Now, just in the little bit of contact I had... Joyce and I had lunch with him and Nancy — I didn't arrange it, he didn't arrange it — some press secretary said, 'They should have a *Peanuts* day in California or something.' So we went up there and had lunch with them." *It is interesting to me, and I think very admirable, that it takes this much time for Mr. Schulz to bring up that he was being considered for an* honour *by the Governor of his state. Such a genuinely modest spirit. Did it take place? What exactly was involved? What did Charles Schulz and Ronald Reagan talk about that led Mr. Schulz to characterize Mr. Reagan as "thoughtful"? Gary's follow-up question:* "Now, would you have done that with a public figure with whom you completely disagreed?" *Schulz's reply:* "Like Barbara Boxer? (laughter)" *Groth:* "There you go." *If you can't get Charles Schulz to criticize Ronald Reagan, hey, any port in a storm.* "I don't know because she's never invited me. I suppose, just out of curiosity..." *The thought remains unfinished. Schulz has too good a grasp on his own reality, as I read it, to spend any amount of time or effort answering hypothetical questions. Back to the factual:* " — well, I went down to see Clinton, and I've attended things for Senator Feinstein, and things like that." *By my inference, Charles Schulz is saying that he completely disagrees with President Clinton and Senator Feinstein — or, more probably, he is in greater disagreement with Clinton and Feinstein than he was with Governor Reagan. Safe from Gary's hypotheticals for the moment, Mr. Schulz appears to remind himself that this is (theoretically, anyway) his interview.* "But getting back to Reagan just to show what I'm talking about, several months later, after he was no longer governor, he and I and a few other people were honored as fathers of the year. We went down, and he was surrounded by some people. And I was lead *(sic)* over there. And he looked down and he said, 'Sparky. It's good to see you.' He said, 'Nancy. Come over here. Look who's here. Sparky's here.' Now, how many politicians and governors are going to do that? He remembers." *What a wonderful story. One of those happy little accidents that inexplicably makes its way into every Gary Groth interview. I mean, can you just picture Charles Schulz being* welcomed *by Ronald Reagan, picture them smiling at each other, giants in their respective fields in the 20th century? You'll have to just picture it, because Gary's turning the wheel hard-to-port.* "I don't want to sound too cynical, but couldn't that just be the kind of professional schmoozing the politicians..." (*Even the patience of a saint has its limits, and Schulz interrupts,*

though I for one would have completely understood if he had asked Gary and his tape recorder to leave his office at that point.) "No, that's just the way he was. And he called me when I was in the hospital and had heart surgery." *"Wow," I'm thinking at this point, "is that right? What year was that? How long before the White House? Hold it. Was Reagan in the White House?!" Hard-to-port, Mr. Groth, sir.* "So you think it was genuine." *Can I add a (sneer) stage direction in my copy? Oh, wait. There's no question mark on the end, so the sneer is implied. Sorry, Gar. You're right.*

"He's taken a terrible beating from the press and other people, just nastiness. (Jimmy) Carter was the same way. I was the Easter Seals Chairman. We went to Washington and had some friends that went with us, and they had to hang back, as I went in to meet Carter. We had our picture taken, with the little girl who was on the poster. And then we said thank you. He asked if there were any folks with me. And I said, "Oh, this is my wife. And her son. And some friends." And he said, "Well, I'd like to meet them." He went over and shook hands with them. Again that was the sort of person he was."

Now, I'm no mental giant, but I think I can see the linking theme of the two stories. Both men impressed Mr. Schulz because they both treated him very nicely, and they treated him very nicely for the exact reason that they were nice beyond the bounds of what was required of them in the situation — especially if one considers the disparity of their respective places in the societal pecking order. Schulz was impressed. Reading about it, I am impressed. Well, two out of three ain't bad. Gary at least allows Schulz to steer his way out of a very awkward exchange without another gratuitous slight. "I don't think I've met any others." *Presidents, Gary.* "Shook hands with Clinton. I talked with Bush on the practice tee at the AT&T." *But he had* lunch *with Ronald Reagan. Just the two couples, Gary. There might even be a nice little anecdote or two since it was, like, an intimate lunch. You've spent two columns of type denigrating the whole thing; why not take, oh, say, a paragraph or two and see if Ronald Reagan didn't tell Charles Schulz a funny story or express interest in some aspect of* Peanuts? *Just, you know, something.*

Sorry, I got carried away there. Anyway, here we are at "Mama's Boy" part four. Charles Schulz shook hands with Clinton and talked with Bush on the practice tee:

"But I'm out of that whole realm. Comic-strip artists are not regarded as celebrities in that way. We don't get the medal of freedom and all that sort of thing. They proposed it for me; I don't think we even came close. Last year on the 100th anniversary of the comics, all the cartoonists wrote to Senator Feinstein to promote it."

Ready?

"But that's all right. I know my place. (laughs) And it doesn't bother me."

Charles Schulz. Knows. His. Place. He is a multi-millionaire, possibly a billionaire, Snoopy and Charlie Brown went to the moon, he is read by 200 million people every day. But. He knows his place.

Okay, I'm off to Florida. You kids play nice. Don't have the TV on too loud, and don't answer the phone after 11 o'clock.

continued

FROM COVER

Yet if Madonna spoke to her generation, she was still condemned to explore herself. The explorations were chilling to some. In all the multimillion-dollar crops of her popularity, she was still without that hyperbolic popularity Marilyn Monroe gained in her own lifetime. Madonna was admired, but she was not loved. Not like Marilyn.

Our love for Marilyn is not complex. She was our movie star of the Fifties, but Marilyn spoke of a simpler time, the Thirties. It was to the Thirties that she belonged. She was three and a half years old at the end of 1929, and a young adolescent by the time 1940 arrived. Her smile goes back to such archetypes in our sentimental loyalties as the songs of the Thirties — "Let's have another cup of coffee, and let's have another piece of pie." She would be valiant and loyal through our sorrows — so said the sweet welcome of her face. Marilyn's horrors were kept within, and we mourn her because she gave it all to us and sacrificed herself until she was ridden with inner lividities and died.

Madonna is not only a survivor but has chosen, perhaps out of the necessity to survive, to take her kinks to the public: "You want to be with me, then come along for the fucking cure." She offers no balm to sweet, sore places; she is the stern instructor who shows us how difficult it all is, especially sex in its consummation. Yet she gives us something Marilyn never could, something less attractive but equally valuable; she dramatizes for us how dangerous is any human's truth once we dare to explore it; she reminds us that the joys of life bed down on broken glass. She is not a lapsed Catholic for too little. *Inter faeces et urinam, nascimur,* she is always telling us, even if she never heard of Saint Odo of Cluny, but indeed it is true. "Between piss and shit are we born," as the good saint told us, and the road to heaven, if you would find it, lies, by implication, between the two. Madonna comes to us as a bastard descendant of the void that Andy Warhol enshrined in the ice of his technique, but how she seeks to fill that empty space with her work!

Last issue's excerpt: Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast*

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